

January 20, 2011

Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks

1420 E. 6th Avenue

Helena, MT 59628

Re: Senate Bill 107

To whom it may concern:

I write to you as a retired National Park Service Ranger. During my career, I served 33 years as a federal employee. Twenty-nine of those years as a law enforcement commissioned ranger with the National Park Service. Between 1991 and my retirement in 2005, I served as the West District Ranger in Yellowstone National Park. In 2007 I had the privilege to work as a seasonal employee with the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks as a River Ranger, based at Camp Baker, on the Smith River. This proved to be a fascinating season for a number of reasons: It was wonderful to experience the changing seasons of a Montana river ecosystem; I thoroughly enjoyed meeting and assisting visitors as they prepared for and conducted their Smith River float trip; it was rewarding to care for the river corridor and the campsites while educating and assisting visitors during our scheduled river patrols; and it was interesting to compare and contrast the inner workings of a different land management agency. It is this last point I would like to address today.

Soon after arriving for my season on the Smith River, I learned that the State of Montana prohibited Montana State Park Rangers from carrying firearms as part of their duties, even if the ranger had attended a POST certified academy. I found this prohibition absolutely shocking and troubling for a number of reasons:

1. It was perfectly clear to me throughout my career, and when I was at Camp Baker, that the public views the Park Ranger as a figure of authority. They expect Rangers to resolve complaints, campground disputes, deal with disorderly or disruptive visitors and in general, maintain law and order and maintain a park-like atmosphere within park units and campgrounds. Montana State Park Rangers wear a uniform, including a badge. They are easily identified and normally drive an agency owned vehicle. Upon encountering a uniformed Ranger, virtually all visitors expect that Ranger to have some level of enforcement authority.
2. Park Rangers conduct regular and recurring patrols of the resources entrusted to their care. During the course of these patrols, Rangers encounter a cross section of park visitors

representing and reflecting a cross section of society. While the majority of park visitors are law abiding citizens, a small percentage are not and are visiting the park units for nefarious purposes, or are wanted for some other crime not related to the park unit. Encounters with these persons can present a very real threat to both Rangers and visitors.

3. Montana has liberal gun laws and Park Rangers commonly encounter park users who are armed.
4. Many of Montana's State Parks are geographically remote. Law enforcement assistance is often either unavailable or maybe hours away. Thus, the Park Ranger is placed in a position where they are expected to take action, or their duties have placed them in a position where action is needed but they are denied the full range of tools required to safely and effectively carry out those actions.

The State of Montana and the leadership of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks should determine what vision they have for the State Park Ranger. Law enforcement duties may not be appropriate for every Ranger. For those who are expected to conduct patrols, enforce regulations and protect park resources, the agency should provide the training, tools and supervision to prepare the Ranger to safely and effectively carry out those duties. Carrying a firearm is not a cure-all, but rather an important tool that should not be denied State Park Rangers who are asked to protect park visitors, park resources and themselves.

I offer support for Senate Bill 107, eliminating the prohibition for State Park Rangers to carry firearms.

Sincerely,

Bob Seibert

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